



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
*1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990*

July 17, 2001

Mary Selecky, Secretary
Department of Health
Office of the Secretary
1112 SE Quince Street
Olympia, WA 98504-7890

Dear Secretary Selecky,

Enclosed is the recently approved report and recommendations by the State Board of Health on one of its 2001 priority health issues—health disparities and workforce development. The Board will include these recommendations in its annual report to the Governor according to RCW 43.20.100. We are transmitting this report to you now consistent with RCW 43.20.050(5). Per your standing request of the Board, we will make copies available on our Web site and we will distribute this report or summaries of it to interested parties. A printed version of the report should be available for distribution in early August and we will provide you with copies at that time.

We would like to thank you for supporting the work of the Subcommittee on Health Disparities as a member of the Board. We would also like to direct your attention to a recommendation that concerns the Department of Health (DOH) and to request your continued assistance with the Board's efforts to reduce health disparities.

As you are aware, following the President Clinton's 1998 initiative to eliminate health disparities by 2010, the State Board of Health made health disparities one of its priorities. In 1999 it directed the Health Disparities Subcommittee to investigate the health status of minority and ethnic populations in Washington State. The results of the Subcommittee's work revealed that racial and ethnic minorities generally have poorer health outcomes than Caucasians in Washington State. In fact, DOH Office of Epidemiology staff found when looking at 24 conditions, minorities carry a greater burden of disease and death in as many as 18 of those conditions.

While there are many factors for these disparities, several studies have shown we can improve the health status of racial and ethnic minorities by creating a health care workforce that mirrors the diversity of the populations it serves. The Subcommittee looked at the health care workforce in Washington and found that the state's racial and ethnic minority groups are grossly under-represented.

During the past year, the Subcommittee identified multiple opportunities to build a more diverse workforce, including facilitating training and credentialing of qualified people with prior health care experience.

On May 9, the State Board of Health unanimously adopted six recommendations for diversifying the health care workforce that were proposed by the Health Disparities Subcommittee. The recommendations are:

- Enumerate the composition of health care workforce;
- Establish guidelines for health career development programs;
- Facilitate training and credentialing of people with prior health care experience;
- Create a graduate medical education incentive pool;
- Develop a health care workforce diversity report card; and
- Coordinate health care workforce diversity efforts.

The State Board of Health requests that the Department of Health, through the professional licensing boards, explore ways to expand the roles of qualified minorities who already have some health care training—namely, foreign-trained health professionals and mid-career health workers interested in advancement. Opportunities include ensuring that the credentialing process provides appropriate credit for prior training and experience (whether obtained here or abroad) and creating internships and supervised practice opportunities for foreign-trained and mid-career professionals who are working on completing Washington credentialing requirements.

The Board is aware of the health care workforce efforts already underway at the Department of Health and is very encouraged to see that workforce diversity is one of many issues being addressed by this group. The Board strongly encourages the Department's Health Professions and Workforce Development Committee to incorporate the Board's recommendation into its work.

An executive summary of this report, which includes the six recommendations adopted by the State Board of Health, is available on the Board's Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/sboh. The slide presentation given at our May 9th meeting is also available there. In addition, final versions of the Health Career Development Guidelines and the Health Care Workforce Report Card soon will be available on our site. We encourage you and your department to use these documents in your work as appropriate.

If there is anything the Board can do to help you in this effort, please do not hesitate to call on us.

Sincerely,

Linda Lake, Chair
State Board of Health

Joe Finkbonner, Chair
Health Disparities Subcommittee

cc: Washington State Board of Health Members
Mr. Don Sloma, Washington State Board of Health
Ms. Patty Hayes, Department of Health
Mr. Ron Weaver, Department of Health

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